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ADDRESS BY SPEAKER TODD RICHARDSON

Good afternoon and welcome back.

It is always special for me to be able to share these moments with the people most important to me – my family - my mother Kathy, who has always been and always will be my biggest fan, and my father Mark, whose service in this chamber inspired me with an unwavering sense that good people in public office make a difference. They are here today and I ask that you make them feel welcome.

My son Sawyer and daughter Briley are here today. They are still the reason I do this, and I ask that you help me welcome them today.

Most importantly – my wife Amber. I could not ask for a better friend, or partner. Every step of this journey we've done together and for that I'm incredibly grateful.

It's hard to believe that six years have gone by since I sat in this chamber as a first-term legislator and listened to Speaker Steve Tilley give his final opening day address. It's a moment I will never forget because he did something with his comments that is pretty rare in this building.

That day he turned his focus away from the policy and the politics, and instead placed it firmly on what really matters – the people. Not just the people we're here to represent, but also each of us as individuals, and the relationships and friendships we form as we serve together.

I think about his words today in relation to the incredible bonds I have forged with the folks from my legislative class, which now finds itself in its final months of service in this chamber.

We came in together seven years ago from all parts of the state and all walks of life. They talk about people from humble origins being able to accomplish great things, and I think that description fits our class of legislators perfectly.

Whether it's a retired educator from Ripley County; a pest control expert from rural Cole; a former Marine Corps Sergeant from Franklin County; or a dental hygienist from Cape Girardeau - as a class we brought together everyday people from all over the state, many of whom shared little in common, but a strong desire to make Missouri a better place.

And it's important to understand these friendships extend beyond party lines as well. I look at the Minority Floor Leader, the Lady from Jackson, who is also part of the group I began my career with, and whose strength and resolve I have admired since the day I met her. We may have many issues where we disagree, but at the end of the day we will still be friends who are united in our service to the people of Missouri.

And that's how we find ourselves here together; farmers, teachers, and business owners; attorneys, doctors, and officers of the law; Republicans and Democrats - just regular Missourians with the desire to make a difference, and the belief that we can be an effective voice for the diverse population of Missouri we were elected to represent.

It is a blessing to be able to stand in this chamber today among friends.

I look at all of you, and particularly the amazing group I started my legislative career with, and I realize that we have forged relationships that will last a lifetime.

I know your families, and you know mine. We have spent countless hours not only working together, but also serving as sources of comfort and support when life's challenges have threatened to overwhelm us. It's this comfort and support we share now with the Lady from St. Louis County who unfortunately cannot be with us today.

This job demands long hours away from our family and our friends, and that inevitably leads us to form our own sense of community and family right here in the Capitol. These are bonds that will persist long after the policy discussions have ended, and the partisan bickering has ceased. These are the relationships that will have meaning and substance as we move into the next chapters of our lives.

For that, I thank each and every one of you - for your friendship, and for the service you are providing to our great state.

Let me be clear about this: I am proud to serve in a chamber filled with individuals who are here for the right reasons and here to work hard for their constituents and their state. We all came here with a goal to leave this building a better place than we found it. And clearly that same idea applies to our state and the things we do to improve it.

I'm proud of the fact we have a group of citizen legislators who have taken that duty seriously, and who have given their time and energy to tackle the issues that mean so much to Missouri families and businesses.

We've seen the Lady from Camden and others devote their careers to protecting the lives of the innocent unborn. We've given our support to the Gentleman from Audrain as he has fought relentlessly to promote and support agriculture and our family farmers. And most of the time, we've all listened a little more intently as the Gentlemen from urban Cole and the

Gentlemen from St. Francois have challenged our conventional thinking on the issues of great importance we've considered.

Now these are just a few examples of those of you who have worked so hard for so long to make a difference. And the thing I take the greatest pride in is that, during my seven years here, we have helped take some truly monumental steps forward for our state.

Together we've given Missouri families their first income tax cut in nearly a century. We've made it clear our state is open for business by passing Right-to-Work; by making our legal environment fairer for both employees and employers; and by taking steps to eliminate red tape that would otherwise stifle growth and innovation.

We've fought for the core values that are important to Missouri families by giving their children better opportunities to have the kind of educational experience that will prepare them for success; we've done it by promoting pro-life policies that protect the lives of the innocent unborn and the health of the mother; and we've done it by defending and strengthening the gun ownership rights of law-abiding Missourians.

We've also worked together to create higher ethical standards to raise the level of accountability and trust in our own workplace. We've worked to strengthen the integrity of our democratic process by ensuring that our elections are fair and accurate. And we've said unequivocally, in our state, the brave men and women who keep us safe will have our support.

These are things we have done together - substantive changes that allow us to leave our state in a better place than where we found it.

And while we have certainly had our disagreements along the way, we have continued to find common ground, and to have the kind of civil discourse that the people expect and deserve from a citizen legislature.

As I prepare to leave this place behind, it's a point of pride for me that we have observed and honored the decorum that is expected within this chamber. Yes, things can get heated at times, but we have continued to respect one another, and to find ways to work together even when we have fundamental disagreements on the best path to achieve our goal of creating a better Missouri.

In a day where we too often see how divisive and contentious politics can be at the federal level, I think it's noteworthy that we have repeatedly found ways to come together in spite of our differences.

I'm equally proud of the work we have done together to improve the culture here within this building. I know we have a group of remarkable legislators, and even better people. You are men and women who care about one another, and respect each and every employee and intern in this building.

Despite this, the people of our state had lost their trust in us, and many of us felt a disconnect between the honorable service of our colleagues and the public perception of our

work. But we worked together and, I believe, have made permanent improvements in the way this chamber operates and the way in which it is perceived. For that, I am extremely proud.

It will be an ongoing effort though to maintain the kind of environment the people who work in, and visit, this building deserve. The same can be said for the work we do with the legislation we support and pass. We've done great things together in the years I have served here, and I think it's fair to say we will leave this chamber and this state in better shape than where we found them.

But our work isn't finished, and it won't be finished at the end of this session. Our goal has always been, and always should be, to make our great state even greater.

That is why it is critical for those of us in our final session, and for those who will pick up the torch when we are gone, to make it our focus in everything we do to leave this state a better place than we found it.

We have work to do so that not only those of us at the end of our time of service in this body, but all of us can look back and remember that in the 2018 session - we once again raised the standard of integrity for ourselves by continuing to pass impactful ethics reform, and increasing the level of trust and accountability between the citizens and their citizen legislators.

We want to be able to look back at 2018 as the session in which we once again stood up for Missourians' economic opportunities; where we once again stood up for the working families across this state, so that they and future generations can look forward to a more prosperous Missouri.

We have work to do so that we can remember this session as one which led to greater freedom for young Missourians seeking the education that will serve them best; that we make this state a place where everyone has the opportunity to build a great life for themselves no matter where they were born or what their parents did for a living.

Too many people in our state must now fight through unfair and cumbersome regulations to offer a simple service such as braiding hair to provide for themselves and their families. We will be able to recall the work we did this session to break down barriers for those Missourians who would bring innovation and economic opportunity to our state.

And finally, we will be able to look back on this 2018 legislative session as the year we restored these dark and dusty corners of the American dream to their original glory; that each of us has the right and the opportunity to live life to the fullest, to enjoy true liberty, to pursue happiness and prosperity; and that nowhere will that be more true than in our great home state of Missouri.

This is the work we have ahead of us. In the months to come we will no doubt have many debates on these issues. We will at times be in fierce disagreement with each other. This is the democratic process that each of us serves.

We who are called to faithfully represent and defend those who send us here will, by the nature of the diversity of thought in our state, have to work through opposition. But while we

may see different paths to prosperity, may we remember that none of us work against the others, but through our debate and discussion, we are working together to provide solutions for the people of Missouri we are called to represent.

Now let us join together in service and good faith for the people of Missouri, so that each distinguished member of this House can one day look back during his or her final session and say that this chamber, this government, and our great state are better off than ever before.